

Test: HOFA Colour Saturator

Pleasant overtones, powerful punch, analog warmth, and even extreme destruction—that’s what the latest plug-in from HOFA’s Colour series promises to deliver. Specializing in saturation and distortion, it uses modern neural modeling algorithms to achieve this. *by Jan Wilking*

Features

- Saturation effect
- Hardware emulations
- Tape, Tube, Desk, Solid State, Hybrid
- Neural algorithms
- BiasEQ for creative sound shaping
- Wow, Flutter, Noise for a retro feel
- VST3/AAX/AU



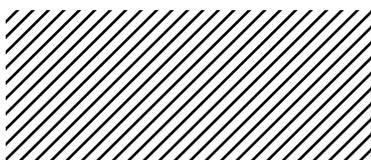
Having already been very impressed with Colour Delay, I was eager to try out the new saturation effect. After smooth installation via HOFA Manager, the plug-in’s clearly laid out interface is once again striking. As with Color Delay, no attempt has been made here to graphically replicate hardware; instead, the advantages of modern software are exploited to the fullest. The individual sections are clearly delineated, and large controls with clear labels invite you to start tweaking.

Input module

The audio signal first passes through the input module on the left. Dynamics is a OneKnob Compressor/Expander that limits or intensifies the dynamics of your signal, adapting it to the subsequent saturation. This is followed by a tilt EQ for adjusting the frequency balance and two LoFi effects: Wow & Flutter for that typical tape warble and Noise for hiss and crackle.

Plenty of models

Next, you select the appropriate saturation model. And here it becomes clear that Colour Saturator goes far beyond the capabilities of typical distortion

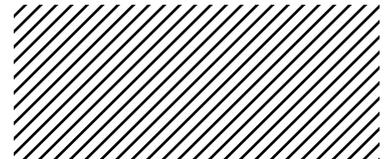


plug-ins. There are 34 hardware emulations available, ranging from legendary mic preamps to various tape machines, guitar/bass tube amps, stompboxes and combinations thereof, as well as other studio classics (such as FET and opto compressors) with harmonic distortion. A drive control lets you globally control the intensity of the effect, from light saturation to heavy distortion.

Innovative BiasEQ

But Colour Saturator doesn’t stop there, because now comes what I consider to be the most exciting part! With BiasEQ, you can increase or decrease the amount of distortion for individual frequency ranges. For example, you can distort the kick and toms in a drum loop, but preserve the sound of hi-hats and cymbals, which are very sensitive to distortion. Vocals can be given more “body” in the midrange, while remaining transparent, intelligible, and not too sharp in the high frequencies. Or you can go the opposite way and distort the high frequencies of a bassline to make it more aggressive and assertive, while still maintaining clear and contoured low bass.

The whole thing is very user-friendly in the form of a graphic equalizer featuring 11 bands. Each band has a large fader that lowers the volume after distortion for the corresponding frequency band while raising the volume before distortion (or vice versa). This directly compensates for volume differences and avoids the “louder=better” effect. For fine adjustments,



the fader can also be split to independently adjust the pre and post levels. And professionals can switch to a fully parametric equalizer for special fine-tuning.

In the test, however, I mostly preferred the graphical EQ. If you map the faders to a hardware controller, it is really fun to play with the effect. I haven’t experienced that with any other saturator plug-in, and it makes Colour Saturator a truly creative effect.

With adjustable hi- and lo-cut filters, as well as a Dry/Wet control for parallel distortion, the effect can be refined further—for example, to gently blend back in transients that are lost with heavy distortion.

Verdict

I grew up with analog equipment and am very involved in the EBM/Industrial genre, so I have a certain fondness for all kinds of saturation and distortion effects and already have a large number of them in my plug-in folder. Nevertheless, Colour Saturator has easily managed to secure a place at the top of the list. Its clear interface, well-designed controls for quickly implementing ideas, and surprising sonic flexibility for a saturator are important arguments in its favor. In addition to its excellent sound, I was particularly impressed by the playful, creative approach offered by the graphical BiasEQ, which breaks down the boundary between pure effect and musical instrument, especially when using a hardware controller, and invites experimentation. 🍷



Facts

Manufacturer: HOFA
Web: hofa-plugins.de
Distribution: Website
Price: 99 Euro

- ▲ Many saturator models
- ▲ Very good sound
- ▲ Clear user interface
- ▲ Creative approach
- ▲ Frequency-dependent distortion
- ▲ Input module with retro FX

Sound: ████████
Operation: ████████
Price/Perf: ████████
Total: ████████

Alternatives

FabFilter Saturn 2
129 Euro
fabfilter.com

Softube Harmonics
148 Euro
softube.com

Wavesfactory Spectre
99 Euro
wavesfactory.com